

February 17, 2022

*Testimony before the Appropriations Committee: HB 5037*

Representative Walker, Senator Osten, Representative France, Senator Miner and the distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for giving the opportunity for public testimony regarding the Governor's proposed biennium budget adjustments. My name is Constance Vickers, and I am the Director of Legislative Affairs for the City of Bridgeport.

I am providing testimony this evening regarding adjustments to our most precious resource- the education of our children. I respectfully ask this committee to reject these proposed decreases based on enrollment and make the bold decision to expedite the ECS phase-in to coincide with the sunset of our federal funding.

While our enrollment has decreased by a mere 281 students over the last year, our special education and English language learners have increased by 18.23% and 23.15%, respectively. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget adjustments fail to consider that when enrollment declines, the class structure and challenges remain. Our classrooms are overcrowded, our teachers lack important resources, and our children lack targeted support, especially when compared to our neighboring suburban districts. Our schools, our teachers, and our students cannot afford any level of reductions or stagnation in funding.

Our Board of Education has had to make extremely difficult decisions to cut essential services and supports, totaling millions and millions of dollars over the last decade. This has resulted in a structural deficit in the operating budget, and compounded with the anticipated exhaustion of ESSER funds will result in a serious financial cliff come 2024. We were already in a crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, our children require even more supports and resources. The future success of our state depends on properly educating and supporting our youth. Substantial investments in our public schools must begin immediately.

I implore the legislature to take this proposed budget and ensure that our most burdened and underserved districts are funded equitably. I encourage you to seize the opportunity of our state's current surplus and overflowing rainy day fund and ensure that our financial health works for all communities. Children who grow up in Bridgeport and attend our public schools should have the same opportunities as a student anywhere else, regardless of their skin color, family income level or zip code. Please make the bold decision to equitably fund our schools now.

Constance Vickers

Director of Legislative Affairs

City of Bridgeport